DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 410 CS 206 611

AUTHOR Harley, John K.
TITLE Inadequacy in the Writing of Academics: A Preliminary Search for Remedies.
PUB DATE May 81
NOTE 46p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English (14th, Vancouver, Canada, May 11-16, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Language Styles; *Professional Development; Teacher Improvement; Teachers; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Academic Community

ABSTRACT

The characteristics of academic writing are examined in this paper, and some remedies are suggested for correcting the "language deformities" that many academic writers persist in creating. Three categories of error to which academic writers are apt to be susceptible are discussed. The first category covers errors that are shortcomings in linguistic sophistication, such as lack of parallelism. The second category is of failures in communication that are attributable to the linguistic customs of the closed society of the university, characterized by ornate and oblique vocabulary, involved and baroque syntax, and recondite allusion. The third category is of inadequacies that arise from the academic discipline to which a writer adheres. Examples of writing problems from each category are analyzed and suggestions for improving the writing styles of academics are offered. (RL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED208410

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Inadequacy in the Writing of Academics: a preliminary search for remedies

(in two parts)

John K. Harley
McGill University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John K. Harley

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Based on a paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. in May, 1981.

CS206611

Inadequacy in the Writing of Academics: a preliminary search for remedies

Part I

As the editor of a journal that tries to bring the work of scholars before an intelligent public, I have had to tend to a great deal of characteristically academic writing in recent years. By academic writing I mean a kind of language product that has for the reader an unmistakable "smell of the lamp." Apart from the deterrent effect of that warning odour on many of the intelligent public who have become somewhat conditioned against it, a high proportion of academic writing simply does not communicate its meaning even to an interested and attentive reader. It ought to come to us as rather a surprise, should it not, that within the prestigious community of learned people whose denunciations of the writing of their students reverberate through the rest of society, it is the exceptional university professor who writes reasonably clearly by current public standards.

This is not to deny that it takes a good deal of skill, and prolonged periods of acquisition, to learn to write in academic language. The model of writing which most professors place before students, and which the students are then often slow to learn, is certainly one of language in good basic mechanical order (usually), but also one encrusted with various linguistic growths so much as at times to amount to a deformity. A growth, in this sense, is a morbid formation ("like a tumour" says my dictionary); what was once healthy growth, in the normal sense, has gone so far as to become dead, and deadening, linguistic tissue.

This paper will attempt to distinguish some characteristics of writing by academics that has gone wrong, and to determine why they happen. The paper is not itself immune, and its language will be recognizably academic in most places, but I have tried to avoid forming tumours. I shall also try to draw the outline of some remedies for this widespread deformation of language that I seriously believe has the effect of distorting the entire educational process.

Deformities often carry a high cultural value. Though objectively grotesque, features like bound feet can acquire great prestige in a community and be admired as beatiful. The language of academia, with its often grotesque and hideous forms, dominates not only the milieu of universities but also much of the educational system and the public media. It appears throughout the textbooks which young people have to read in high school and even in elementary school, and prevails in all the forms of communication by which we receive information as adults, including, as well as newsprint, the talk show on radio or television and the ubiquitous "educational" film, with its remorseless stream of earnest, multisyllabic, and self-important commentary.

People growing into our world, then, have constantly set before them as a highly prestigious model this special kind of talk and writing, that they are taught to respect even in its most clumsy, ugly, and pompous manifestations. Small wonder that healthy youngsters react to this unpalatable diet with distaste and a prolonged resistance. Yet it does not seem too much to expect that academics should be able to write about their work in a way that is really readable to an intelligent lay person; and if they all did so, what a difference that

would make to the tone of education in general, in particular to the language that young people might then emulate.

Method

The incentive for this study having grown out of my work as editor, I decided to continue in the procedures which had served me well in that role, and to base my classifications and analyses mainly on my judgment of what is at fault, and of what has caused the faults, in various passages of writing. The sampling of these passages has little to do with any justification by numbers, or by precedent elsewhere. This procedure, reliant as it is on various "tacit integrations" from my years of teaching, reading, writing, and editing, finds some endorsement in the newer paradigm that occupied attention at the "Learning to Write" Conference at Carleton University in 1979.[1]

I turned to a variety of texts, some of them awaiting editorial attention, others coming casually to hand from journals, articles and announcements emanating from the academic community either directly or indirectly. The criterion for selection was usually exasperation. While I read I would note words, phrases, and syntax causing snags and eddies in the flow of my attention; and then in review I would explore these with speculation about what had caused the writer to deviate from the alternative and much clearer language available to him or her. (I would have had reason to expect clearer language from a writer who had otherwise written readably in a number of places in the text. Again, most academics can presumably talk clearly enough to the plumber or the children when called upon.) I would often write lengthy notes on the subject; in every case I would find a pattern running through a number

of failings, although these were often of quite different linguistic phenomena; such a pattern would serve to suggest the greater significance of certain errors over others either less frequent or more tolerable, and hence to confirm the explanatory value of one among several postulates about cause towards which I might be leaning. Not uncommonly, however, there would be more than one pattern present, and more than one postulate would therefore seem to be confirmed.

The errors I am dealing with thus appear on the surface texture of a discourse, and do not touch on matters of arrangement of content by paragraphs and larger segments, although these are normally of prime concern to an editor. The authors, being learned, generally knew whereof they spoke and could organise their matter quite efficiently, if not always effectively. I eventually arrived by this process at a first broad division of all such errors in academic writing into three main categories. The categories embrace, along with syntax and even routine mechanics, matters of rhetoric which I have not hesitated to designate as errors.

Three classes of error

Academic writers in general, of course, are apt to be susceptible to any or all of these categories of error, in any combination. The first category covers errors that are shortcomings in linguistic sophistication (or errors of linguistic naivety, whichever way you want to look at it) which are shared by many academics with a great number of other quite well-educated people simply because they have never had the remedies brought firmly enough to their attention. They include several principles in syntax or in rhetoric, such as parallelism, that

should be relatively easy for academics to appreciate because to break one of them usually constitutes an offence against the elementary logic of the statement being made. For whatever reason, the writer here has not learned to "monitor" his discourse, in Winterowd's sense, for these particular errors. Correspondingly, if we may assume that the writer is indeed keen to do something about it all, the remedy seems to lie in some specific language learning of a "laboratory" kind - again using Winterowd's terms.[2]

The second category is of failures in communication that are attributable to the linguistic customs of the closed society of the university. Characterized by ornate and oblique vocabulary, involved and baroque syntax, and recondite allusion, these habits of speech not only have the effect of hindering comprehension for people who do not belong to that society or share those habits, but also give the appearance of actively rebuffing it. The causes of customs are cultural: there is in universities an unduly heightened consciousness of a social context, whether of an idealized one of a universe of intellectual people, a threatening one dominated by one's superiors in academia sitting in judgment, or a consoling one of an audience of students and others inferior in knowledge, who may therefore be subtly reminded of their inadequate status. The remedy is likewise cultural. These writers must be weaned of any unreal anxiety that they may have acquired from the intensive status-seeking that characterises many academic communities, persuaded of the real similarities between members of the academic community and the public, and convinced of the legitimacy of bridging any real differences between themselves and their audiences when they speak or write.

The third category is of inadequacies that arise from the academic discipline to which a writer adheres. The disciplines I have most to do with in education have furnished most of my examples, and it is on them that I will focus my discussion under this head in the second part of this paper. The language that people most often use in psychology and sociology, and of course in education, must have something to do with the frequent failure of studies in these fields to earn much credibility with colleagues in other fields or with the general public. It is a language that confines itself almost exclusively to abstract nouns, impersonal or passive constructions, and statements so heavily qualified that they cannot seriously be called assertions. On the one hand it displays a generally shared academic preoccupation with what has gone on in the writer's mind and, rather than on relations with actual events, on relations between concepts. On the other hand it reflects faith in a research practice that has been committed to achieving defensible generalizations almost exclusively by working with large numbers and with probabilities. Hence to persuade many people working in these fields that their reports would benefit from some concrete and specific vocabulary, mostly personal and active constructions, and a few unhedged assertions, is to run up against an entire system of disciplinary taboos.

The problem of finding remedies for this category is similar to that for the previous category, though more intransigent. Individuals may be persuaded to relax their fears of the disciplinary taboo by studying the example of those successful writers in the same field who do follow time-honoured principles of good rhetoric such as the

frequent use of effective illustration, or simply a preference for plain language. On the other hand it is possible that entire academic communities in psychology, sociology, and related disciplines, which now appear united in adherence to "an epistemology of disinterestedness"[3], may in quite a short time - it's been done before - switch their allegiances to some other epistemology less incompatible with the processes of knowing by which (as we believe) good writing is achieved.

About the third classification

The blocky language of abstract nouns unwieldily predicated by inert verbs and long-dead metaphors is not just the invention of the scientists of human behaviour, but of course is part of the baggage of the academic in almost any field. Mina Shaugnessy has done a noble job of distinguishing some merit in the kind of language her "Basic Writers" in first year university were expected to acquire, and of providing a rationale so that she might then devise and organize the ways and means of their achieving it.[4] I say "noble" because her misgivings, about the kinds of linguistic example being offered by her professional colleagues of the targets she was supposed to help her students hit, appear relatively briefly in Errors and Expections. These misgivings are shared, I know, by practically anyone who has approached the teaching of first-year composition with a fresh mind. But she presents very fairly the considerations that govern academic discourse, and that make learning to use abstract language such an exacting and necessary experience for thinking people.

For her one of the two major conventions that govern academic discourse is that of "ranging widely but in fairly predictable patterns

between concrete and abstract statements, between cases and generalizations". She proceeds to expound various ways of teaching her students to do this. Though she is well aware that writers must move along this range in both directions, it is after all natural that her suggestions are on the whole concerned with helping students move up the ladder of abstraction. The problem we face here, however, is with getting many academic writers, who seem to be stuck petrified, like kittens, at the top, to move down that ladder.

Moreover, I am suggesting that the patterns of "ranging between concrete and abstract" differ with different disciplines, and are not common throughout a university. This is why, without excluding the probability that the same excesses are committed in every academic field, I have not generally included excesses of abstract language under my second category, namely errors of linguistic custom in academic society, but under this separate, third category. In doing so I have assumed that the remedy will vary with the methodology of each discipline.

I have concentrated my attention on the human sciences because they are my journal's chief resource for manuscripts, as I have said; but not only is the problem of excessive abstract language there particularly obtrusive, it has particularly unfortunate consequences. For the paradox is that those sciences, that set out to account for the actions of human beings, seem continually to attempt to do so in a language that is almost exclusively impersonal and general. To other observers it seems plain that most human beings act for reasons that are highly specific and personal; individuals continually escape sociologized

generalizations, not because of the incompetence of the generalizations but because of the competence of the individuals. The apparent incompatibility between the language of human science and the humanness of its subjects, in particular, must account for much of the aforementioned unwillingness of intelligent people to yield much credence to your average psychologist, sociologist, or educational researcher.

Second category errors in a case of good academic writing: K

Early on in my work, in order to test things out on an example of good academic writing, I considered an essay-review appearing in the Harvard Educational Review and written by a former acquaintance who has earned a good reputation in his field. What follows is based on my notes written at the time on K's essay.*

"Generally a clean, lucid style, carrying no excess weight of vocabulary, and having direct, relatively short and simple syntactical structures with familiar but energetic and active verbs. On the whole an admirable model.

"Failings are infrequent... There is the occasional yielding to the temptations of sonority or sententiousness... and there is in the contrary direction an occasional concern to contract into one word or phrase some relatively unfamiliar meanings...

"Like anyone speaking out of a disciplinary background and in its context, K is inclined to use in code certain words that would

---

* Since a number of the writers whose examples I shall use are likewise known to me on what I hope may continue as a basis of friendship, I shall use letters of the alphabet for these authors and will not give further references, though I am prepared to document each case on request.

otherwise be familiar to the lay reader. Used without warning in a message that is otherwise sent in clear, one of these words inevitably awakes in such a reader an unintended value and a sense of disturbed meaning which he may not immediately locate, but which must either be backtracked down or ignored. Such words in this essay are construction (e.g. '...their construction of the foundations of learning...'), efficient, revolution, resolution, appropriation and reappropriation. Other coded words, which do not carry a strong and alternative everyday meaning but which are apt to leave the lay reader hanging for the meaning of the sentence as a whole, are construe, rationality, and inform (e.g. 'These books not only created the world we live in but also continue to inform it through constraints, theories...'). Had K written shape for inform, for example, it would have made no perceptible difference to the quality or elegance of his argument, and would have made it more accessible to many readers.

"The same applies to his occasional academic orotundities, where the purpose of the usage is not to render a meaning precise but merely to give it an air. One is entitled to attribute such a motive when an author has used a word or structure that is not used in ordinary speech, but that brings him no advantage in sense, whether explicit or implicit. Such a word in K's essay is transcend. used twice in much the same context ('Her argument transcends the battle') where rise above would be normal and indeed rather more visual in image.

"There are very few of these in the essay, by the standards of accepted academic discourse, but they do come in little bunches.

Slightly stilted phrases crop up in the same sentence: 'A related argument against the perennialist position (previously well defined by K) was that it put forth an educational philosophy that was pre-democratic, and as such, antidemocratic...' And at times K embarks on whole rolling orotundities in which the sentence structure itself as well as words and phrases appear designed only to parade in academic robes for the moment: 'For how better can we initiate our students into the pursuit of those truths that concern us and our departments? How better can students learn reflective inquiry than by engaging in it through critical encounters with those books that set our field apart?'

"A different symptom of this same kind of lapse of concentration on the sense... is the fudged metaphor... 'the root questions that underlie the present world'.

"None of this matters much in the flow of thought that the essay exists to present... Of any serious interference to meaning from his own formulations there appear to be only two examples.

"The first offers a suspected case of 'bootlegging', where an argument for one kind of thing is smuggled into discourse that is pursuing another line of thought. The sequence begins with one of the author's more marked instances of academic coding in the word construction, proceeds however to clarify another code word, inquiry, but in the process introduces a number of other considerations:

> The crux of her argument lies in her construction of education as inquiry. Inquiry denotes questing and questioning. It connotes searching into things and seeking out truths. Thus inquiry focuses on first and last things, origins and ends, efficient and final causes; it seeks to understand how things came into being, and what they are for.

"Beginning from the academic in-word crux there crop up words and phrases we can suspect of being chosen for their tone alone: questing, seeking out truth, seeks to understand. Why does questing and questioning seem so like searching into things and seeking out truth that both pairs seem to refer to the same activities? Are denotes and connotes really in contrast (and in code)? Are denotes and connotes not merely repeating each other, and is the exercise not merely one of echo? Is however what follows Thus another such series of reiterations, or is there something going on behind the academic code of efficient and final causes that we are not being invited to explore? If so, something is being slipped past us - or being 'bootlegged'. (Actually there is probably nothing going on but an orotundity, but the reader's predictable suspicion illustrates the phenomenon.)

"The other difficulty follows closely in K's text.

> The insistence that education be useful - whether for private or public utility - creates a paradox because it construes learning as a means instead of an end, goal, or purpose shared by all human beings. "All human beings by nature desire to know," according to Aristotle.

The difficulty of this passage hinges on the choice of the ambiguous word learning. Learning is the means to an end that is also called learning; it is hardly a paradox that one acquires learning by learning. Moreover, when I think of learning in either sense, purpose strikes me as rather a means instead of the end with which it is sonorously grouped here. A complete analysis of the difficulty would be a lengthy affair, but there is a hint here of K's inadvertent use

of what Ogden and Richards call, rather splendidly, the Utraquistic subterfuge. It is a coincidence that they offer a very similar example: "Knowledge may refer to what is known or to the knowing of it. The Utraquistic subterfuge consists in the use of such terms for both at once of the diverse referents in question." They comment that it "has probably made more bad argument than any other controversial device."[5]

To summarize, my study of a model of good academic writing establishes, even in this very healthy piece by K, a few instances of types of weakness characteristic of language customary in academic society: academic coding, academic orotundities, fudged metaphor, and bootlegging, to name them as I have named them (a more defensible illustration of bootlegging will appear shortly); and a case of syntactical ambiguity, which belongs rather in the category of linguistic sophistication. To correct for the latter, a writer would have to learn to monitor with suspicion all use of words ending in -ing, in the knowledge that they are frequently positioned ambiguously. (Does driving anxieties mean anxieties about driving, or anxieties experienced while driving, or even anxieties that drive you?) To correct for the former, however, a writer needs a heightened awareness of the reclusive state of academic society, and an acute sensitivity to its weakness for linguistic pomp and abracadabra. (Of course this is quite easy to say.)

Further examples: metonymy, cant, perhapsism, etc.

As I worked through other articles, further examples of the same things appeared, together of course with new phenomena. The writers of these were generally much more obviously in difficulties than K had been, for I was now looking for writing where communication had failed.

R

The opening section of R's article was unduly turgid with compressed statements, the vocabulary dense with allusion and coded words, and the syntax often strained by inversions, interpolations, and appositions. The following is characteristic, and also offers a clear example of bootlegging.

> "This Hellenistic view of language,[1] continued by the trivium and reinforced by Cartesian rationalism, has pervaded the teaching of language for 1900 years or more and for the most part still continues to do so."

In its context, the sentence is abrupt in its mention of Hellenism. The idea is introduced in a syntactically secondary role, as an adjective, structurally subordinated to a subject and predicate that are apparently intent on making some other point, a point which however in semantic terms is subordinate to it (1900 years does take us back to the Greeks). This structural subordination of an element important to an argument is characteristic of the technique of bootlegging. The footnote number which tells us to look elsewhere for support for the assertion that this view of language is Hellenistic, is also a familiar device of the species.

I shall select another sentence from this writer, following not long after this one and near the conclusion of his introduction, to show what can come of sustaining the manner for long.

> "The traditional classroom, in contrast, generally fails to see that a concept is at best only slightly developed in 'vocabulary building' by synonyms, which are approximations and can only identify."

(Simpler version: A traditional teacher believes that building a vocabulary of synonyms will teach a concept. At best it does very little; synonyms, being approximations, can only identify a concept, not explain it.)

The general fault of this sentence is its prevailing indirectness. The metonymy (literally, change of name) of classroom for teacher conceals a person, and the figure of speech becomes slightly absurd when the classroom fails to see something. What it fails to see is that a concept is at best only slightly developed, which is a negative and passive and altogether roundabout way of wording what some teachers positively try to do. The quotation marks around 'vocabulary building' are a favorite academic device for showing your disdain for someone else's idea without actually saying anything. The phrase in contrast has no referent at all, explicit or detectably implicit, in the preceding text; this is rather too common a phenomenon among educated writers. The prepositions are loosely chosen: in should be by, by should be with.

Apart from the metonymy with its depersonalizing rhetorical effect, all these errors are really failures in linguistic sophistication, although the writer himself is a scholar of language. I account for this sort of lapse with the conjecture that the effort of keeping up with linguistic custom is indeed tiring when it is attempted as intensively as it was here. Moreover the 'set' you have to adopt in order to maintain it, of a detached and omniscient observer, will lead you repeatedly into formulations like fail to see that are awkward to work your way out of; the sense has then to be stood on its ear.

C & H

The authors of the next examples, C and H, offer a surface of discourse, though written in a much more relaxed and less formal manner, that is just as difficult to read as R's opening remarks. It is also if anything more baffling to edit, for in their text are to be found all three categories of error, having all three kinds of root cause, in a kind of tangled growth that seems to defy pedagogy.

The first example seems to begin harmlessly enough:

> In conclusion, if there is any message from the evidence of this study, it is suggested by the large number of parents who felt that teachers initiate no contacts for the purpose of conveying positive messages about their children's performance in school. One might label the practice of deliberately initiating such contacts as an 'outreach' function in parent-school communications.

Up to the word felt this is reasonably plain language, for the assertion of a tentative conclusion from the evidence. I shall have more to say about that disarming tentativeness later; but it is suggested by and if there is any message are suitable uses of impersonal and passive constructions for describing the emergence of a thought. From there on the sentence means, and should have read, "felt that teachers do not call when their children are doing well". This is more or less exactly the wording used by the authors for that particular item in the study's questionnaire that had received such a strong response from the parents. Why then did C and H not write such a simple and readable sentence in their "discussion"?

What is happening in the paragraph (and in these two sentences) is that the "message" is being translated into doctrine. Hence

initiating a contact, stressing the conscious effort on the part of school staff that the authors are about to recommend in order to improve practice. "Making a call" or just "calling" would say nothing explicit about the need they see for taking some initiative; yet do teachers, I wonder, change their habits more easily if they are asked to "initiate a contact", rather than simply to "call"? The authors wish however to draw a moral, and to do that in terms of a theory, by converting teachers from not calling to deliberately initiating such contacts and by urging them to do so for the purpose of conveying positive messages.

This pressure on the readers to change their ways, clothed in a series of euphemistic generalizations, I began by calling 'doctrinal exhortation', borrowing somewhat from I.A. Richard's pleasant invention of 'doctrinal adhesions'. We applied the term to the same sort of phenomenon working in reverse, when readers interpret poetry as advocating or contradicting a doctrine that they care about.[6] We seem very susceptible in our time to this sort of linguistic inflation. We hear doctrinal exhortation in our daily conversations, whether they are about dieting or personal relations or bringing up children. Marin County's mellow talk is full of it. The simpler word for the phenomenon, of course, is 'cant'.

The formulations of the second sentence in the above example are the payoff from the first. Thus it begins we might - a persuasive ploy to include the readers, though still tentative; practice suggests imposing some institutional rules as well as changing people's

personal habits; deliberately demands an effort; initiating a contact portends something more professional, permanent, and reciprocal than simply calling. 'Outreach' is in quotes because it is in fact the 'label', rendering function quite superfluous, a doctrinaire intrusion. Parent-school communications is bootlegged in as an entire department of a school's organization, having various 'functions' of which this is only to be one.

Now the article from its very first sentence had argued for "an effective program of school-parent communications", and did so quite comprehensively. But we may note that in our example the authors seem to consider the adjunct parent-school interchangeable with school-parent, even though the direction in which initiatives should be taken seems to matter a good deal to them. They might have been less indifferent to the point had they not used the depersonalizing metonymy of school instead of a word for the actual people they meant to persuade such as its staff (including principal as well as teachers). What they are focussing on, then, if we must use that formula, is staff-parent communications.

A second example from these authors concludes our preliminary inspection of cases:

> ... as an active rather than a reactive form of communication, outreach may place the school in a better position to exercise leadership in dealing with an increasingly complex and active environment. Moreover, as the findings of this study have suggested, it may also contribute to the perceived openness of the school, and such an image seems essential to the establishment of an environment that will be supportive of the school.

We can find here coding (perceived openness), cant (be supportive of), and some inflated and fuzzy language of academia (in which an environment can be active). That the authors are also prone to commit frequent linguistic inaccuracies is shown by an absence of referents for better and such (in such an image), and a rather loose use of as to mean because it is.

But I have included this particular example in order to point up another common phenomenon in academic linguistic custom, what I call perhapsism. In perhapsism the writer avoids getting himself committed to anything literally, while nevertheless appearing to make an assertion which he really wants to make. If challenged he may thus always claim, "I only said that it was perhaps so." In our example, outreach may place the school in a better (no referent) position, and it may also contribute to an image that seems essential (the "seems essential" is an especially neat example of perhapsistic finesse). Perhapsism can be really valuable in university language as a way of exploring unknown ground, as scholars perpetually attempt to do; but it is far too frequently exploited in situations where any risk is minimal and need not be underlined. It often gives rise to a timid frenzy of redundancies: "Perhaps it might sometimes happen, should the circumstances arise..."

The dossier so far, and two maxims

Our dossier thus far has collected some examples in the first category of errors (of linguistic naivety): syntactic ambiguities; the omission of referents for words of comparison or contrast; the

loose use of prepositions; and negatives and passives that render predications needlessly obscure.

The second category (linguistic customs of academia) now includes academic coding, ranging from specialised uses of everyday words to recondite allusions; academic orotundities, shaping words, phrases, or entire sentences; fudged metaphors; bootlegging; cant (or doctrinal exhortation); and perhapsism. There is nothing particularly novel about these except perhaps some of my terms for them. Some of them may be ascribed to adopting a 'set'. Such a set predisposes a speaker or writer to select certain kinds of words, to formulate phrases or sentences so as to express a sense of distance and detachment or so as to conform to certain kinds of sonorities in pacing and rhythm, and to resort to certain limited and academic classes of experience for colour and tone. Others - bootlegging, cant, and perhapsism - represent on the other hand a particular group of foibles to which academics are susceptible as they seek advantage in argument - foibles apparently tolerated, if not encouraged, in the social climate in which they live and work.

There is probably nothing one can do for someone who is susceptible to a foible besides pointing out its objective symptoms, such as the redundancies of perhapsism and the inflatedness of cant, and then challenging the author to consider their causes. One can hardly lay down laws or even maxims for the arts of persuasion, and authors must develop their own guidelines once they have become truly aware how such covert persuasion, direct or indirect, is liable to backfire. As to

remedy for the 'set' that a writer may unknowingly adopt in the academic milieu, I have already suggested that causes latent in his or her perceptions of the social context must be attacked, for it is a context that of course includes, but does not exalt, that academic milieu. Whereas the writer who is susceptible to foibles of persuasion underestimates much of his audience, the writer who assiduously indulges in coding and orotundities overestimates it because he has not really considered all his potential listeners.

The linguistic, objective remedy, once the writer is convinced that he will gain interested readers and lose none by following it, is presumably to apply some general maxim of the 'plain words' variety, modified to permit him a ration of coded terms provided that they be stipulatively defined in the text. It may seem harmless that many academics automatically say and write frequently instead of often, or opportunity instead of chance, but when the same kinds of multisyllabic choice follow word after word for page after page the effect can be marked: a loss of audience because of a blurring of attention to the words in the communication that really matter. Again, one must not seem to argue against the stimulating effect of an unusual word or two, as Beatrix Potter knew when writing for children. But to those who take a pleasure in particular words it must be pointed out that, like self-indulgence in anything, the pleasure is not automatically shared by others. If they take care to share the pleasure, of course, well and good. Otherwise, a strange word in its arbitrariness does not simply not work with a reader. In some it arouses indignation at

mumbo-jumbo; in others, even after decoding, it may still set up irrelevant associations. The word eponymous, for example, which is really a sort of pompous pronoun much used by critics of literature, invariably prompts in me an image of something with four legs and a large head. I don't know why.

Another remedial tactic here would be to adopt a subordinate maxim to the plain words one: "Take nouns out of the text". Instead of exercise leadership write lead, instead of agreeing to the selection of, agree to choose, and instead of a school principal having a negative attitude toward parental contact, let him or her simply dislike parents who call up. This zapping of everything that moves into the rigidity of nouns has a long, pre-academic history, especially in the language of human relationships, and hence it is particularly difficult to dislodge, especially from the language of the behaviour sciences as we shall shortly see in discussion of the third category (inadequacies arising from the discipline). Yet it is particularly rife throughout academia, because of an everlasting compulsion on scholars to appear objective and hence to objectify, or make objects of, every event in sight. Thus are created innumerable "phantoms, due" as Ogden and Richards observe, "to the refractive power of the linguistic medium".[7] Our world becomes crowded with "things" that only "exist" because we have invented nouns as well as verbs for them.

Part II

The effects of a discipline

Let us now sink to some of the depths of which our language ought not to be capable, in some examples of writing from the behaviour sciences. These are no extraordinary cases, however - perhaps quite mild indeed; but they may furnish some insight into what I believe is the toughest problem for remedy, a disciplinary ethos that presses (though it does not compel) its academics to evolve continually many gross distortions of the language.

A and Y

My next example again has a combined authorship, in A and Y. Combined authorship may reflect an aspect of the problem; you never seem to get joint authorship of a literary critique, for instance. Having another person almost literally at your elbow as you write is to realise in rather concrete terms the presence of a specially knowledgeable audience of fellow academics, a presence we already know to be a prevailing determinant in the syndrome of academic publication. This article was published in a major journal of education not long ago:

> Innovations representing considerable investment of time, energy and money are being continually introduced into school systems. Too often assessment of these innovations is scanty or non-existent. Of the several aspects of an innovation which should be examined, the one receiving the least attention is the level of implementation. X and W indicate that there are many determinants contributing to the satisfactory implementation of an innovation. In this study one of these determinants was examined, namely, the roles of school system personnel who are directly or indirectly involved in a curriculum innovation. A method was developed to identify the specific roles of personnel in an innovation, and to assess the extent to which these roles were being implemented. It involves the use of an idealized

> model of a fully implemented innovation, against which the current role behaviour of school system personnel can be assessed.

What happened? The scene is strewn with nouns like stones, inertly predicated almost throughout by passive voice constructions. The meanings of such nouns as implementation, innovation, and level seem blurred at every turn; indeterminate words like considerable, satisfactory, indicate, and involved prevail; tautologies are three a penny. The level of implementation is said to be an aspect of an innovation (fudged metaphor). Roles are a determinant of level. Roles can be implemented; so can innovations. Is it all a form of perhapsism, where every edge of meaning has been deliberately ill-defined? Is there an uneasy awareness on the part of the writers that there's really nothing in the study that isn't fairly plain sailing and yet that it would be unacademic to say so?

The impression one gets, of a vague, dimly-lit region through which move various shapeless entities having no visible means of locomotion or support, is not altogether an illusion. The authors have their minds on certain concepts like roles with which they have been trying to explain certain confusing realities of the behaviour of people within organizations. Such concepts are formed in the minds of researchers by their generalizing from observations of real events. If things work out, the authors and others hope to be able to predict real events from their observations of the concepts. What we are listening to here is the authors' description of the concepts moving about in their thought, as it attempts to model real events; but the

description has as little visible relation to those real events as clouds have to the ocean or steam to icicles.

So they wrote this opening paragraph, which was to establish a setting in which their study would be seen to take its place as a sensible line of inquiry to follow. They put their main subject as they saw it up front, and began with "Innovations". Having done so, they needed a verb. What do innovations do?

There the difficulties begin. Innovations is a concept, a noun made from the verb innovate, the reification (or "conversion into a real thing") of an activity. On the one hand, it is consequently ambiguous, meaning either the process of innovating or the state of affairs, or product, that that process brings about. On the other hand, the word being a generalization, it represents a great many matters having little to do with the authors' concern here. Even under the heading of "innovations in school systems", a lay reader may start thinking of new school uniforms or soccer for girls. Obviously, people who think like this are not intended to be in the audience; but the audience of the journal in which this appears does include, in fact, academics from many other disciplines in education, who must be considered to be lay readers as far as the field of educational administration is concerned.

However, a lay reader might be expected, by searching the implications, to assume that here innovations, being matters of educational administration, signals administrative activities that are intended to have educational consequences, such as the curriculum

change we read about lower down. Unfortunately the adjunct educational in the noun phrase educational administration is also ambiguous: the phrase may mean administration on behalf of education (whether of education as process or as product) in the sense above; or it may simply mean the administration of educational institutions such as school systems - in which case the introduction of school uniforms would be a real issue and a reasonable way to "read" the word innovations.

Two maxims for writers in the human sciences

Reified terms such as education, learning, and innovation, it is clear, are apt to have a built-in uncertainty. Uncertainty on any scale damages the readability of a passage (and also casts doubt on the precision of its author's mind).[8] The fewer terms like these flung around in writing the better, just as, in a plan for research, the number of such concepts is normally severely restricted and their meanings defined with the greatest care. A and Y should not have begun their article with a reification, and this one was both ambiguous and outsize.

What then should they have done? One tactic from many a writing manual would have been to start with a concrete illustration, describing some school system that had once unsuccessfully attempted a curriculum change. Setting such an illustration out in full might involve a lengthy detour, and the writers do want to get on with it. Though a concrete example like that would give repeated payoffs throughout the paper, by making it easy for the writers to meet their readers' demands for specificity by referring back to their illustration of an unsuccessful

change of curriculum, we should understand the reaction of the average social scientist to such a proposition, with its apparent demand for a certain journalistic pizazz: something like beginning with "Superintendent John Jones slammed his hand irritably on the steering wheel as he drove homeward..."

There's nothing much wrong with pizazz, but such a line of approach would have had to be adopted, and cheerfully, before ever the paper were begun. And how do you reconcile it with the academic demeanour appropriate for "rigour", that idol of research? Well, that's not nearly so tricky as it might seem.

A simpler prescription, either for the initial approach or for subsequent revisions, is to compose any general statement by wording first the action as a predicate, and then the agent as subject of the sentence. The action here might be worded bring in new practices. Then the agent, if one doesn't wish to get into unnecessary detail, could be simply people - and we are human at last. "People bring in new practices. They invest much time, energy, and money. They rarely try to assess the results." Once you have a really active agent like a human being, other predicates in the following sentences seem to come easily and naturally.

I submit this quite time-honoured recommendation, of searching for a verb that defines the event and then for a noun for the agent, with that all-important rider that in the human sciences, wherever possible, the agent be human - real, not ideal or conceptual. It is a maxim, of which my own application above is of course idiosyncratic;

adequately applied, it might conceivably correct many of the problems of expression, and behind them of definition, that plague the field of human science.

I offer also at this point a second maxim, to cope with the ambiguities inherent in reification and with a type of consequent error very common in that field, namely using reifications as adjuncts to nouns. The type is represented by such phrases as educational administration, role behaviour, and system breakdown, and as we shall shortly see, it includes hideous conglomerates of as many as five reifications at a time, multiplying the number of possible meanings by permutation and combination of ambiguities, to a degree of uncertainty that baffles the mind (or to high degree of ambiguity permutation-combination mind bafflement). The maxim is "Represent any relations between concepts by small words, not by juxtaposition".

The juxtaposition in role behaviour might suggest the bahaviour expected of a person in the role (a description of the job), or else the behaviour aroused in a person by his or her role, which is often quite different. Does system breakdown mean breakdown inside the system, or breakdown outside it but caused by the system? Applying this maxim prevents a writer from using labels that are inherently ambiguous and remain so, whether or not they have been defined. The writer must either repeat using a small word like for (behaviour for a role) once it has been defined, or find out - as he or she often will - that a single word like behaviour alone will work perfectly well after all.

O

I turn now to a manual that was designed to instruct graduate students in educational administration. Whereas it cannot represent all those manuals of thesis writing to which hundreds and thousands of future academics have been referred in their time, being the personal ad hoc effort of an individual professor, O, it does suggest that some of the havoc I am seeking to remedy is a matter not of accident but of intent. There is evidently a massive river of modelling and instruction in writing rolling broadly through the social science disciplines, against which any proposals to change matters might seem as futile as the struggles of a fly.

This manual follows the familiar Table of Contents sequence of a conventional thesis, from the Abstract to its References, and gives several examples under each heading, "taken from the best journals in the field". A short preface by O urges the student "to think and write scientifically: choose precise words and phrases; be specific and avoid ambiguity and vagueness; present your ideas orderly and sequentially; use an economy but smoothness of expression."

These well-intentioned if sometimes ill-formed precepts are then left quite devoid of any realistic support; the examples that follow in the manual proceed to break them on a massive scale, and yet the compiler remains silent, offering no specific comments. The first example in the manual, one of several under Abstracts, follows in full.

> "This study examined the moderating effects of organizational independence. Survey data were collected from 211 quasi-professional employees in one firm and from 111 hourly employees in another. Many findings were contrary to the hypothesized

> relationships. Specifically, job scope and leader heirarchical influence were more positively related to satisfaction for employees who perceived organizational independence than for employees with no such perceptions. Also, leader consideration and leader technical competence were more positively related to performance for employees perceiving organizational independence."

An obvious feature is the number of reifications in juxtaposition: organizational independence (independence of the organization from something else, or from the organization of its employees?), survey data (why not just data?), hypothesized relationships (or hypotheses), job scope (scope in the job or of the job?); leader heirarchical influence, leader consideration, leader technical competence. These clumsy and puzzling labels should surely be made understandable to a quick reader of the abstract, and after all no abstract is so desperate for space that it cannot afford a phrase like "the influence of a leader on the heirarchy", if that is what that label means.

There are other quite unnecessary obstacles to understanding in this abstract. Moderating effects in the first sentence has no referent to tell us what is being moderated. The second sentence has numbers in it, serving no purpose here, and a mystifying pseudo-contrast between quasi-professional and hourly employees, not at all explained by the later comparisons between employees who perceived organizational independence and those with no such perceptions.

Reports of experimental studies like this must frequently present contrasts and comparisons between groups of people, yet one is struck repeatedly with the weakness of writers in these fields on this point of rhetoric. It often seems that a writer has deliberately avoided

plainly identifying a contrast, as he might by using a pair of phrases like part-time and full-time, but has instead resorted to some capricious (and rarely elegant) variation of vocabulary such as hourly and quasi-professional. It does show a rudimentary sensitivity to a rhetorical consideration (by avoiding repetitions of similar terms), but it is misplaced when the consequence is confusion. Such sensitivity would have been better directed at the different rhetorical problem of the last two sentences: this is a syntactical problem, where the key contrast is between satisfaction and performance but is almost completely hidden, for the words are buried in the middle of each sentence instead of taking conspicuous places at the ends. When one is writing for the human science disciplines, a particular lack of linguistic sophistication in the management of parallel structures becomes a major liability.

I cannot resist quoting the brief note that concludes this section of the manual: "As these examples illustrate, wording is precise, ideas are presented orderly, and ambiguity is avoided. Try to implement the same writing style throughout your paper."

Some language factors in research thinking

That something rather odd is going on when a behaviour scientist fixes upon a variable that can be "measured" is a suspicion in the minds of many (including of course numbers of scientists in those fields). I am now going to speculate that linguistic error, besides providing symptoms of uncertain thinking after the event, may already be contributing to some uncertain thinking before it, in the following invented case of a behaviour study in embryo:

I am sitting by the window in my house in winter-time, and I see a black squirrel (we have black ones in Hudson in Quebec) trying to jump up onto our bird-feeder, which is brimming with sunflower seeds. The feeder is mounted on a pole recently equipped with a metal cone opening downwards, designed to prevent entry to just such unauthorized parties as this indignant squirrel, who is not taking it well. He has made several unsuccessful jumps from a nearby stump, but has come off with less dignity each time.

The sequence of statements that follow might represent the process in my mind as an idea for research takes shape.

Applying my first maxim about actions and agents, I report: (1) I see a squirrel jump for food. All concrete words. (Perhaps a presumption of a motivation in for; strictly, it jumped towards the food.)

But then, (2) I study squirrels jumping for food. I multiply the observations, assuming all the cases to be alike. (Some however may be jumping from habit, or merely in imitation of others.) The presumption of my care and thought gives us study; I am now an academic.

(3) I study the jumping for food of squirrels. Note the reification of jumping, an unobtrusive syntactical change with serious rhetorical side-effects. A number of leaps in the air here become a "thing", the direct object of study, and the lazy black squirrels of Hudson have receded into a vague background composed of the entire world population of squirrels, who are all assumed to be prone to jump for their food.

(4) I study the food-stimulated jumping of squirrels. The new noun acquires an adjective and the new "thing" an attribute, as if food-stimulated - like high, accurate, or rapid - could be objectively verified. (The phrase incidentally implies that food has an active property that can stimulate animals, and of course is a squashed version of stimulated by food.)

(5) I study the hunger-motivated jumping of squirrels. I am now presuming doctrine (for the motive could be appetite, not hunger).

(6) I study the hunger-motivated saltation of squirrels. A touch of class, and of course of implied class-distinction. What might be called techno-classicism: you code a simple phenomenon, like jumping, into academically O.K. form, and so add the colour of a necessarily exclusive expertise to an otherwise simple train of thought.

(7) I study the hunger-drive saltation of squirrels. Another step into doctrine with the word drive, and with the same step, reification of the adjunct. A pair of nouns in front of saltation now forms a conglomerate noun phrase of the familiar Teutonic kind: we shall be lucky if the hyphen is left in, to help us sort out which noun is adjunct to which (a problem exemplified by the apparent series of adjectives before stranger in "tall loose limbed stranger.")

I reach the point of almost total obfuscation quite easily by more of the same:

(8) I study squirrel hunger drive saltation. (A four-noun conglomerate, staking the claim for a new field of my own.)

(9) I study sciurine hunger drive saltation. Just a bit of further techno-classicism, to add tone and remove the last trace of vulgar concreteness. Well, not quite. I nearly forgot -

(10) This study of sciurine hunger drive saltation. Any suggestion of personal presence is of course taboo (the Cheshire Cat principle for achieving rigour in research), and active verbs do disturb things (they suggest real behaviour).

After taking these ten easy steps to obfuscation, I begin to consider an independent variable, namely how cold it is, to account for the fluctuations in this now quite awesomely-named dependent variable. Hence a hypothesis:

(A) Sciurine hunger drive saltation is affected by temperature. The "thing" has acquired an ability to change, and hence a dimension in which to do it. It now has an almost concrete "body".

And with a hackneyed metaphor or two, for much the same idea, the "body" becomes alive -

(B) Sciurine hunger drive saltation responds to temperature.

(C) Sciurine hunger drive saltation rises with temperature.

What rises? The "body"? No, but what "rises" could be the frequency, or the length, or the strength of the jumps made by my various squirrels. For each of these dimensions there really ought to be a different explanation, however, and correspondingly then a different hypothesis. In actual fact, as we shall now see, this is not always worked out.

Under "Hypotheses" in O's manual the following example appears:

> "Based upon the aforementioned theoretical framework, the study's major hypotheses were: (1) there will be a positive relationship between the similarity of the superintendent's and elementary principal's organization behaviour perceptions and the amount of role conflict of the elementary principal; and (2) there will be a positive relationship between the similarity of the superintendent's and elementary principal's organization behaviour perceptions and the amount of role ambiguity of the elementary principal". (emphases added)

These researchers intended to quantify a similarity - it can be done in terms like "60% alike" - and calculate its relationship to such other "quantities" and amount of role conflict and amount of role ambiguity. But what can "amount of ambiguity" mean? Now one might measure conflict by how often it happens (or its frequency); or by its intensity when it happens; or simply by declaring it present (1) or absent (0); but each of these dimensions would call for a different explanation, and a different hypothesis. This slap-happy wording, shown with "amount", is also displayed with the other variable, which should have been worded "degree of similarity". It can hardly be excused as a sort of drafting of the hypothesis in principle, leaving the details of measurement to be decided later.

To review this exploration of fallacies in the disciplinary process that may be attributable to linguistic error. Writers in behavioral fields seem liable to be beguiled by various problems inherent in the factors of multiplication and quantification. So as to enable measurement by statistical means, they allow these factors to shift their attention away from the individual responsible to the generalized acts. (Researchers who work by studying individuals and cases should not have these problems.) Reification is often a

consequence of the need for something significant to measure; because it happens easily with syntactic transformation (I am thinking becomes my thinking), it offers "something" apparently ready-made and tempting to consider as significant. If it may be measured by any contingent manifestation, such as blood going to the head, then it becomes a variable, a thing with measurable size, sometimes greater and sometimes less in rate of blood flow or frequency of pulse. These changes in some given dimension may now tempt a writer to describe it in metaphors, that can either remain inert and mechanical in their implication (rising and falling) or else imply a state of voluntary or involuntary life (responding). Once again, the language's seeming equivalence has been a trap, this time a semantic one, in which connotation has quietly taken over from denotation.

Thus an experimenter has been persuaded to believe in the existence of a thing, because of a syntactic correspondence, and has begun to endow it with properties, because of lexical and metaphorical correspondences. I know this is a simplistic view of a set of philosophical as well as methodological problems that must have been tackled by others much better qualified to do so;[9] but I have gone into it because it does suggest the kind of depth into which remedial pedagogy must go if the surface discourse of many writers in the affected fields is to become more readable.

If there is one feature of writing in the behaviour sciences that is common to the many side-slips into loss of precision that happen in the course of naming a variable and evolving a hypothesis,

it is a rather widespread indifference to significant linguistic differences. We have had squirrels jumping equated with the jumping of squirrels, amount of conflict equated with its frequency or its intensity, rising and falling on a scale equated with responding. Many social scientists seem to treat language as a kind of algebra in which it matters very little what letter or label you give to anything for the time being (and hence near-equivalences in words or metaphors are accepted as readily interchangeable). Likewise the order in which things are represented matters little: a + b = b + a. Of course it follows that if as a researcher you see the task of reporting your work in this way, as a sort of coding into near-mathematical formulae, you will be quite indifferent to the effects of connotation in vocabulary and of placement in syntax. Rhetoric will remain for you a closed and rather useless book.

Indeed your approach to the organization of the report as a whole will be affected, and you will naturally adopt the particle approach. The only problem here really is to leave nothing out: collect everything, use a check-list, and Bob's your uncle. Here is O's preface again:

> "The structure outlined in the next pages allows you to use the "folder method" of doing research. Have a folder for each structural component; collect information, data, articles, thoughts, etc., as they occur and put them in the appropriate folder. In this way you avoid losing ideas and material, and you will know exactly what to look for and what to work on. When each folder contains sufficient material, spend one weekend to write your first draft in one long session."

A direct consequence of this particle approach is the frequent use of numbers and of lists in point form, and the consequent fragmentation of otherwise coherent matter into particles when it is often quite uncalled for. Questions of sequence are dictated pretty well by the chronology of the experiment, or by the logic of the hypotheses. Problems like thinking of a controlling metaphor or of appropriate examples, so as to achieve some kind of ranging between the abstract and the concrete, simply do not arise in such a scheme of writing, for it becomes simply a question of arranging and copying your lists.

A review: Category One

What have we found in these examples, and what can be done? In the first place we have found what ought to be a surprising number of errors for educated people to have made, that should have been cured in school or college, and that can still be cured in much the same way by anybody who wants to learn. (I have almost invariably found that authors of poorly-written papers are genuinely interested in improving their writing if only they can trust the remedies.) Appropriate laboratory work is not difficult to devise for these kinds of things:

including referents for all words of comparison or contrast
using prepositions precisely
using the active voice in statements involving abstractions, and
putting statements in positive form
*discriminating precisely with moods and tenses of verbs
avoiding syntactical ambiguities

---

* (not exemplified in this paper, but frequently found in error)

avoiding tautologies

managing parallelisms in both vocabulary and syntax

We have noted that certain of these, like the deployment of parallelisms, are apt to come to the fore under particular conditions like the reporting of statistical findings. Some such interaction between the three categories of error I have drawn up is in the nature of things. The point here is that all of the above can be taught directly and are well within the scope of secondary school teachers, so that as well as programs of cure, a program of prevention seems perfectly possible.

Category Two

A program of prevention for linguistic customs in academia is hardly feasible; though perhaps, to the extent that they are a function of a privileged exclusiveness, some academic customs may be in for some serious change shortly at the hands of economic forces. The list of available offences that I have compiled may seem long, and not directly teachable, and generally hopeless of results, but there does seem to be in practice a way of solution. So far as I have been able to ascertain, those academic writers who do write readably on abstruse matters have one thing in common: some personal experience that has provided a motive, or that has compelled them with professional help to act as if they had the motive, to overcome the barriers of understanding between scholars and intelligent lay people. It may have been having to teach a class of apprentices in the city, or writing an article for a popular journal, but they have usually, it seems, acquired the

motive to write for socio-cultural reasons and in a social context.

I repeat here a few maxims, for the benefit of writers who wish to try to cross bridges.

Weed nouns from the text all the time (Like crabgrass, they can only be kept back, not eliminated)

Use plain words

Do not use coded words without definition

Avoid recondite allusion

Do not indulge in orotundity in word, phrase, or sentence

Do not fudge metaphors

Avoid smuggling, or bootlegging, one idea under cover of another

Refrain from cant; keep doctrine in its place. (A sketch map is not a template)

Do not disguise assertions (let the reader say 'perhaps')

To achieve change in one's own language may require a wrench in one's entire intellectual sense of self, wrapped up as that is with any strong awareness of social context. Chomsky remarks "In science it is self-evident that concepts are going to change; that is just to say you hope to learn something. This is not theology, after all... By contrast, in the social sciences or in humanistic studies, positions are often personalized... It becomes a question of honour not to change, that is, to learn nothing..."[10]

Category Three

The plague of offences in language evolved by the "epistemology of disinterestedness" has its origin in the habits of discourse that

generally prevail in universities. But it is compounded both by the problems of generalization that are peculiar to the human science disciplines and by a relatively low level of linguistic sophistication displayed by a number of these academics. Nevertheless there do exist writers in these fields who are readable and clear to the outsider whether in academia or in the general public. I have commented on the powerful forces of instruction in the social sciences, tending to maintain in unquestioned place this same nexus of practices in a kind of cult language. I might also add the observation that in universities, graduate students in the human sciences tend to be kept apart, like acolytes, without mingling with others in other fields. To some extent this is increasingly true of graduate work in any field, and it must harm the ability and readiness of all future professors to explain themselves to others. A program of prevention then would ensure among other things that graduate students discussed their work informally and frequently with students in other fields.

The list of errors begins with some already found in the preceding categories that have a peculiar virulence in the disciplines I have concerned myself with. In other disciplinary areas, like the applied natural sciences, medicine, or law (Eagleson has commented that no discipline with a profession behind it seems immune[11]), other dispositions to error will no doubt be characteristic.

Laboratory work on teachable elements

Managing connotation as well as denotation

Different words have different effects

Different syntax has different effects

Different placement has different effects

Different metaphors have different effects

Elegant variation yields semantic variation

Managing parallelism, in word, phrase, or sentence

*Discriminating between determinants - the difference between a, the, and plurals when representing the membership of a class

Recognising syntactical ambiguities

Using active verbs (impersonal constructions and the passive voice imply the immutability and invariance of laws; to suggest this seems especially inappropriate for generalizations that have been founded on probabilities).

Maxims

Managing abstractions

Weed nouns from the text (Hirsch has pointed out that readers get less information in the ordinary sense from a text that is richer in information in the technical sense, or, in other words, that is loaded with technical terms[12])

Express relations between concepts by words

Keep reified terms apart

Eliminate labels that embody nouns as adjuncts to other nouns

Provide concrete referents for abstract terms wherever possible (in other words, give examples from life)

---

*(not exemplified in this paper, but generally found)

Personalizing the text

When in doubt, select the words for the predicate before selecting the subject

Select human beings as subjects wherever possible

Use personal pronouns frequently

Avoid using metonymies that depersonalize (teacher, not classroom; staff, not school)

This paper's categories are of the causes of inadequacy. The basic remedies, that should undergird one's use of the surface maxims, have to do with an author's willingness to improve his or her readiness to forego privilege and to look beyond the academic community; and in the case of human scientists, require the author's freedom from disciplinary anxieties. The target group of this paper then is not that grade of academics who already exhibit these virtues. I have assumed no more than a threshhold position about the achievement of good writing, setting up no ideals, knowing that an attentive and interested layman reading about difficult matter is ready to swallow a good deal of grit without discomfort. But bad writing should set off alarms in academia. And it evidently doesn't.

References

1. Michael Polanyi in Sam Watson, jr., "Polanyi and the Contexts of Composing", in Aviva Freedman and Ian Pringle (Eds.) Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition (Ottawa: Canadian Council of Teachers of English, 1980) pp. 19-25.

2. W. Ross Winterowd, "Developing a Composition Program," in Freedman and Pringle, op. cit. pp. 157-171.

3. Sam Watson, jr., op. cit. p. 24.

4. Mina P. Shaugnessy, Errors and Expectations. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

5. C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, The Meaning of Meaning, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Jovanovich, 1959) p. 134.

6. I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1929)

7. Ogden & Richards, op. cit. p. 96.

8. E.D. Hirsch, The Philosophy of Composition. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1977). pp. 95-100.

9. See Ogden and Richards, op. cit., for their remarks on the dangers of misplaced trust in symbol systems, and especially a footnote on p. 96 quoting F.P. Ramsey in Mind (October 1925) pp. 404-5. Also their Supplement II, by F.G. Crookshank, discussing such failures of language in the study of medicine as the "hypostatization" of the word disease.
See also Suzanne Langer, Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling (1967), Chapter 2, "Idols of the Laboratory", passim.

10. Noam Chomsky, Language and Responsibility. (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977) p. 176.

11. R.D. Eagleson, "Learning How Not to Write at University", in Ian Pringle and Aviva Freedman (Eds.), Teaching Writing Learning (Ottawa: Canadian Council of Teachers of English, 1981) pp. 179-185.

12. Hirsch, op. cit., p. 95.